

THE EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE IN MY COMMUNITY

Violence is a broad topic that we talk about but can never really, truly understand unless we've experienced it. This is a firsthand account of the violence that has plagued our city in the hope that you will not pity us, but rather better understand our circumstances.

I have lived in East St. Louis since the age of ten. At that age many things from the outside world, such as violence, were foreign to me. Upon moving in not long after Thanksgiving evening, I endured my first drive-by shooting. It was a traumatic experience, to say the least. However, those around me acted as though it was something as average as the mailman coming to deliver mail. And at that time, it confused me how something so despicable and so hateful was seen as a natural part of their lives. I guess that's what this issue stems from: those people who have to endure it are just allowing it to happen with no objections.

This was just one of many incidents I have seen throughout my time of living here. The saddest part is that it wasn't the last. I am now a sophomore in high school and I've lost more classmates than I thought was possible. Only one from these deaths was from natural causes. Going to funerals and candlelight are a part of our routine. Creating posters and signing get well cards has become a normal task. And although it never ceases to shock us that a friend of ours or even a neighbor was gunned down due to violence, it also never ceases to hurt us. It has simply just become a part of our lives to accept that this is how things are.

There are 26,000 people who live here in East St. Louis. Ninety-five percent are black, and more than two-thirds of the city's children live in poverty. East St. Louis has become a well-known hot spot for crime. Our city has become a statistic. This is affecting our city on both a mental and emotional level. Yet there are no places we can express our feelings, so the person affected by this becomes the one affecting others. And so, a deadly cycle continues.

I'm one of the people caught in this deadly cycle. Who's to say I won't be the next lifeless body found on our streets? The body that's swept under the rug like all the others? Who's to say it's not your mother or your sister or your brother? We constantly walk our streets in fear of not making it home. Our parents pray over us because that's all they can do when we pass the threshold of their homes. They take us to church because, as they say, "A family that prays together stays together." For them, God is the only safe haven they have. This is what our city is like.



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